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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

WRITING CONFERENCE INTERACTIONS AND POST CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

By

Tanya Anderson-Humphries

(C)

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

and Research

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Education

Department of Elementary Education

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring, 1990

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Writing Conference Interactions and Post Conference Activities" submitted by Tanya Anderson-Humphries in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

James Blakey
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Dr. J. Edwards

K. B. Jacknicke
Dr. K. Jacknicke

Date: November 28th, 1989

DEDICATION

To my dad, Eldon Anderson,
who shares with me a love of
and skill at writing.

To my husband, Shaun Humphries,
whose loving support helps me
believe I have something to write
about.

Abstract

In the recent past, interest and research into the conference approach to teaching writing has grown. The purpose of this study is to describe the nature of the conference interactions between a teacher, Mr. Nelson, and four of his grade one students and the activities of these same children after conferencing. The teacher data consists of conference transcripts, a daily journal, informal comments, and formal interviews. For the children, the data includes conference transcripts, writing samples, informal comments, and formal interviews. Over the four consecutive weeks of data collection, I was a participant observer in the classroom. The data built profiles for all five subjects. The findings that relate to conference interaction are examined around the teacher's dilemma of what to say and do and Schutz's (1973) theory of interaction. The activities of the children after conferencing are described in relation to the literary response findings of Tolkien (1965) and Benton and Fox (1985). The concluding statements tie together the children's necessity to explore, play, and lead their own learning during and following conferencing. Within the teacher-student conferences there is a dilemma for the teacher. The teacher studied felt that in spite of the literature available about

classroom environments, non verbal communication, verbal communication, and goals for conferences, nothing could prepare him for these sessions. He saw each conference as an individual and spontaneous encounter. No program of studies, professional advice or curriculum model can do any more than suggest possibilities or share personal experiences. The roles observed are reciprocal and dynamic for the teacher and the child. Each young writer's activities following conferencing are unique. In each case the children seem to do what they need to in order to adjust to the classroom after being involved with the teacher and their writing. While moving, playing, and talking they process thoughts and ideas, solve problems, and reflect on their piece of writing and/or the conference. The activities the children chose to involve themselves in are rarely extensions or modifications of the piece or of ideas discussed in the conference. Most often the children choose to play, draw, read, drink, eat, discuss, or visit the washroom. Several recommendations for further research are made.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Through the 1960's and early 1970's, many educators viewed writing as a rule laden, forty minute period of instruction. For others, writing was a relatively misunderstood, neglected school subject. Public interest began to grow and was further stimulated when Newsweek published an article entitled "Why Johnny Can't Write" (Sheils, 1975). The article exposed a very serious situation wherein schools and reflected the values of a society in which the written word was not a high priority. The media caught and spread the color and tone of this article and much public discussion followed. At the same time, many educators in New Zealand, Canada, United States, Great Britain, and Australia were exploring natural, integrated approaches to the four elements of language. This was done through movements such as open education, language experience, individualized and personalized learning, and language across the curriculum. These movements were essential to the development of the current whole language philosophy. Whole language integrates reading, writing, listening, and speaking into meaningful experiences for children. The writing process

begins through a child's play or by sharing stories or events. Then parts of the story, play, or experience are considered after the whole experience has been internalized and made meaningful.

Graves (1975), who directed a project examining research on the writing process of young children, states that there is a need for "developmental studies related to children's writing" (p. 41). He notes that "we need to describe what is contained in writing conferences" (p. 203).

Before the mid 1970's there was little literature or research concerning writing conferences with children in primary grades. The popularized works of Graves (1975, 1977) are exceptions. As he wrote about the process of children's writing, conferencing became an integral component of the approach.

Since the early 1980's there have been a number of studies and a range of literature produced involving writing conferences in primary classrooms. A few authors such as Harste, Short, and Burke (1988) refer to conferencing as a small part of the editing process after a piece of writing is completed. Others, such as

Graves (1983b), Atwell (1987), and Parry and Hornsby (1985), believe conferencing is an integral part of the writing process that should occur before, during, and after the writing of a piece. It is this latter view that is basic to this study. Whatever role conferencing plays in a writing program, it is agreed that the interaction which occurs is extremely important for the teacher and the young writer.

In a successful writing conference the teacher becomes a collaborator in a workshop atmosphere rather than assuming a direct instructional role (Dyson & Jenson, 1981). There is increasing evidence that this collaborative role increases the composing process. The major challenge of conferencing is how to respond to the child's piece so that the young writer does most of the talking (Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1983b; Jacob, 1982).

Conferencing is often used to keep children composing (Interview with Donald Graves, 1987). However, the activities children engage themselves in following a conference are at first not obvious composing activities. Based on an extensive review of the literature, it is apparent that there is a lack of information and

understanding concerning activities children engage in following conferencing. However, literature related to the nature of children's literary response to story reading seems to be very similar to conferencing responses. Tolkien (1965) writes that we as writers and readers enter an "imaginary limbo." It appears that when children finish conferencing with their teacher they require processing time. The teacher and child have intensely, willingly blocked out everything except each other and the writing during conferencing, and have created a "Secondary World" (Tolkien, 1965, p. 8). When a conference is over, "You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside" (p. 8). Here, Tolkien is referring to storybook reading; however, he, along with Benton and Fox (1985) and others, believe that "writing and reading are indivisible." With this as a premise, parallels will be drawn between responding to literature and the process of conferencing.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to: 1) investigate and describe the nature of writing conference interaction between a teacher and four of his grade one students, and 2) examine the activities in

which these children engage themselves following conferencing.

Coming to the Questions

I had conferences about my writing with my father when I was a child, and later as a student with my professors. It seemed a natural progression that I conference with my young writers as a teacher. In 1987-88, while teaching in a Native Canadian School, a colleague commented as he observed my writing time that both the children and I spent too much time talking about writing and not enough time actually writing. He added that he thought the one-on-one (conferencing) should be spent on drill, not on the children's writing. This man challenged me and (unknown to him) motivated me to delve into the literature on conferencing. As I read and talked to others, I found that all my questions could not be answered. Specifically, questions about my role and the impact conferencing made on children's writing. At this point, a professor at a university encouraged me to go back to school and investigate. As I started my graduate work, I knew I wanted to explore the writing conference process.

Research Questions

The following research questions are based on the major purposes of the study.

1. What is the nature of the interaction between the teacher and a student?
2. How does the teacher use a particular question or comment to meet a particular child's need(s)?
3. What roles emerge during conferencing for the teacher?
4. What perceptions does the teacher in this study have about his role(s) in conference interaction?
5. What perceptions do children have about conferencing?
6. What kinds of activities do the children engage themselves in following conferencing?

Limitations

1. The sample is too small to allow for any generalizability of the findings.
2. Only individual conferences between the teacher and four children involved in the study have been observed and audiotaped. No account is made for peer conferences or group conferences.

3. The presence of the researcher and tape recorder may in some way change the regular course of events. In addition, some interviews with the children have been outside the classroom. This may affect the children's responses.
4. The validity and reliability of the study is limited by possible researcher bias.

Significance

There is a lack of authentic empirical, experimental, or naturalistic research about conferencing in primary classrooms. The nature of the interaction that actually takes place in a conference is not understood (Graves, 1975). Specifically, it is not known how the roles, questions, comments, and perceptions of the child and the teacher interact. McKenzie (1985) states that because the adult's interaction with young children

> seems to be crucial in influencing children's learning and language development ... there needs to be more understanding of the nature of the interaction, an understanding of the changing role of the participants, [and] the

> crucial part the teacher plays in allowing learners to play their part more fully. (p.248)

Literature could not be found concerning the activities children involve themselves in following conferencing. Therefore, this study's descriptions will, it is hoped, aid classroom teachers in understanding the nature of conference interaction and the activities children involve themselves in after conferencing. It is hoped this study will also supplement the literature concerning writing conferences.

Organization of the Thesis

In this first chapter, background of this study, purpose, research questions, limitations, significance, and thesis organization are presented. Chapter Two contains a review of the related literature. In Chapter Three there is a detailed description of the design of the study. Chapter Four discusses conference interactions. In Chapter Five, the findings concerning the children's activities following the conferencing are examined. A summary of the study, conclusions, implications for classroom practice and research, and a concluding personal statement are presented in

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

> The conference is a kind of collaboration, a form of working together more common at home, at play, and at work than in school. (Sowers, 1982, p. 89)

An extensive review of available literature on primary children's writing conferences reveals a paucity of empirical studies. However, the literature available on whole language, communication, writing, and the relationship of writing with listening and reading is very extensive; consequently the literature included in this review is limited to writing conferences with elementary school aged children. Most of the literature presented in this section is naturalistic and/or relates the teacher-researcher experiences published in journals and books. This review of literature is presented in four sections: first, the work of Donald Graves; second, the general research to date concerning

conferencing; third, roles in conferencing and, finally, responses of children to conferencing.

The Significance of Conferencing: Donald Graves

Introduction

Following a diverse career path, Graves was drawn to the field of reading. While struggling through a course in the rudiments of the Russian language at Harvard, he began wondering how children learn language. This interest began a string of education courses concerning language acquisition and reading. During the mid 1960's while working on a doctorate his focus again changed to the composing processes of young children's writing (Graves, 1983b). He was the first researcher who did not look at children's writing as only a product (Brandt, 1982). Graves believes that children's education involves "the active process of reading and writing" (Brandt, 1982, p. 58). Following in the footsteps of his research heros, Jean Piaget and Henri Fabre, he used direct observation to develop his theories. Graves is considered to be a pioneer on the direct observation of children's writing. The topic of young children's writing, and the methodology he used, was at first poorly

funded even though the public was interested. During the early 1970's his foundational work included pleas for funding, and attention to, children's writing. It was at this point he published Balance the Basics: Let Them Write (1978).

During what is referred to as the "Writing Crisis" of the 1970's, he received funding for his "Atkinson Project." This project took place in Mary Giacoble's grade one classroom in Atkinson, New Hampshire. In her room children wrote daily, choosing their topics and conversing with their teacher individually in conferences. After years of careful observation, Graves and his colleagues Calkins and Sowers, revealed their two major findings. The findings suggested that children's knowledge of mechanics surpassed their age level, and that children's scores on standardized reading examinations increased dramatically when conferencing was part of the writing program.

From 1976 to the mid 1980's Graves published articles, continued his research, and spoke all over the world as an advocate of the power of writing. He believes writing develops a process of learning that kindles a deeper education of each person's struggle

"to know." Barrs (1983) feels that Graves has moved directly from studying the process of young writers to the direct teaching of writing. She states that his methodology is "dogmatic and interventionist" (p.833) and does not approach the process of writing as one of discovery. Graves agrees (1983c) that intervention should not occur as often as it has but that children's writing and the talking they do about writing is the best way to find out how one learns to write.

Brandt (1982) believes Graves most important achievement has been to research and write about "what some good teachers have recognized intuitively, that children can and want to write much sooner and more often than people think" (p. 57). Calkins (1986) and Atwell (1989) acknowledge Graves' impact on their personal writing and teaching of writing through his "gift for working with people" (Calkins, 1986, p. 10). The impact of Graves' pioneering work is impossible to measure and difficult to describe. Due to the focus of this study, only his research and literature directly related to conferencing will be presented in the next section.

Conferencing

> Students adopt other writers' ways because they have plenty of time to do both, where they can choose what they'll write and read, and where they give, receive, and hear plenty of response. (Atwell, 1987, p. 252)

Graves (1982) believes that "conferences can lead to dramatic changes in children's writing" (p. 75). To help teachers assist their young writers, Graves wrote Writing: Teachers and Children At Work (1983b). In terms of conferencing, his purpose in this book is to:

> deal with the specifics of helping children to speak, from the arrangement of conference setting and nonverbal language, to the details of helping children to continue to speak once they have started. (p.97)

In this unprecedented and popularized publication, Graves laid out in a basic, clear, and concise manner the principles of

conferencing. The following two sections present his views concerning interaction and activities following conferencing.

Interaction

Graves' (1983b) premise is that "until the child speaks, nothing significant has happened " (p. 97). He offers much how-to advice on getting children to speak and keep speaking. He recommends teachers allow young writers to teach them by reacting "intelligently" to their students "leads" (p. 127). Instead of direct instruction, Graves encourages teachers to interact by asking "questions that teach."

> Questions are effective because they are timely: the child speaks and the teacher listens and then is able to ask the type of question that helps the child to maintain control of the piece he is working on. (1983b, p. 107)

He lists and discusses with examples several kinds of relevant questions that help teachers interact with their student so that they "gain an appreciation of how certain types of questions help

children, as well as the kinds of useful information they reveal about the child " (1983b, p. 107). Graves maintains that conference interaction is at its best when children start to "ask their own questions" (1983b, p. 117).

Graves (1983b) believes conference interaction is an essential component of young writer's growth and should occur at every "stage" in the development of a piece. Conferences are stimulating "because they are unpredictable" and "work because the teachers are disciplined" (1983b, p. 119).

Happenings Following Conferencing

Graves does not write specifically about the activities young writers engage themselves in following conferencing. He does however include conferencing in his definition of composing. "Composing refers to everything a writer does from the time first words are put on paper until all drafts are completed" (1983b, p. 223). As a result, his comments about activities while "composing" are relevant and applicable. Graves, writing about this personal experience with the composing process, states that:

> there are days when nothing works. I write a line. It doesn't fit. I try another line. A dead end. I clean my study, make phone calls, eat, return and write some more. I don't know what I'm doing but the fingers still work on the keys. I wonder when the great breakthrough will come. (1983b, p. 224)

Each young writer's journey through the composing process is unique. The commonalities Graves believes "all writers follow " are the activities of "selecting," "composing" and "reading." For some young writers this is automatic, for others it is not. Graves states that writers all have moments "when the choice of the right word [topic, organization, title] can take as long as five to ten minutes, even need to be abandoned for another day" (1983b, p. 227).

Concluding, he believes that teachers need to "understand" what it is like to compose. In doing so teachers will allow their young writers to "move through this growth cycle" (1983b, p. 229). An awareness of "principles of development" and an "understanding of the process itself" are important characteristics of successful writing teachers.

Writing Conferences

> Writing conferences can lead to dramatic changes in children's writing. (Graves, 1982, p. 75)

The term "writing conference" was first applied to young children during the mid 1970's. The application of the term was new but the concept was not. Many years previously, Ashton-Warner (1963) and Britton (1970) published literature advocating natural interaction in the classroom. The following paragraphs describe the literature to date concerning writing conferences between a teacher and a young child.

Graves (1975) examined the writing processes of seven year old children. His data gathering procedure included one case study, an analysis of broad samples of writing, and the observation of children in formal and informal classroom environments. Each child kept a writing folder containing all assigned and unassigned work. Fifty-three observations examined the writing processes of fourteen children. Finally, interviews were conducted in which each child was asked for his/her thoughts on what good writers do when they write. The one indepth case study included all of these

procedures. The findings in this study resulted in conclusions about learning environments, sex differences in writing, developmental factors, and the writing process. Graves (1975) found two different types of writers: reactive and reflective. Reactive writers have trouble reviewing their writing as they lack "a sense of audience." When evaluating their writing, they utilize affective reasoning only. These children use "erratic problem solving strategies [and] overt language" (p. 36) when preparing to write or when writing. They require "immediate rehearsal in order to write" (p. 36). Reflective children demonstrate "little rehearsal for writing [and] little overt language to accompany writing" (p. 36). Sometimes they would reread to change small parts or a few words. Their understanding of audience grew as did their "ability to give examples to support their reasons for evaluating writing" (p. 36). Graves concluded that in writing conferences reactive and reflective children would react differently to the same type of question posed to them.

Dyson and Jenson (1981) suggest that teachers teach writing in a collaborative role. A teacher's goal should be to:

> share with children our view of writing as a "messy"

> share with children our view of writing as a "messy" process of finding ideas. Thus, we interact with them as they write. We respond to their meaning, letting them know that they are communicating. We ask questions, assisting them in refining and elaborating those meanings. (p. 12)

Calkins' (1986) study of the teaching of writing affirms these comments:

> writing is a process of interacting with one's emerging text, it is important to ask questions of students that help them interact with their work-in-progress. (p.119)

Newkirk and Atwell (1986), Calkins (1986), Graves (1983b), and Atwell (1987) maintain that their research indicates that conferences of even ten to thirty seconds can produce profound modifications in children's writing if children know they are being listened to and if the interaction is constructive and encouraging. These researchers also believe that the timing and choice of questions and comments influence the success of conferences.

Between 1981 and 1983 Graves, Calkins, and Sowers used classroom observations and case studies to explore the composing processes of children and the types of questions teachers ask during conferences. Graves (1983b) developed categories of questions teachers use during writing conferences. They are:

1. Opening Questions
2. Following Questions
3. Process Questions
4. Questions that Reveal Development
5. Questions that Deal with Basic Structures
6. Questions that Cause a Temporary Loss of Control

(p. 108-116)

Graves further states that the goal of asking questions is to help children ask themselves questions that probe and evaluate. He states that teachers' questions and comments ought to be encouraging and respond to the individual need(s) of children as they write. Graves maintains that writing activities can be organized into three phrases: pre-writing, composing, and post-composing. "To conference with a child and respond to the essence

of his/her message, to develop a sense of voice and authority takes preparation, practice and skill" (Graves, 1977, p.823).

Calkins (1986) identifies five different types of writing conferences that are used by teachers. They are content, design, process, evaluation, and editing conferences. She maintains that "in real life they overlap and blur together" (p. 121).

Sowers (1982) writes "there is a mystique surrounding questions teachers ought to ask students in a writing conference" and that "a good conference is a workmanlike conversation about writing, not an interrogation" (p. 76).

Hemming (1985) maintains that in her conversations with children she is able to question and probe without interrogating about the complex act of writing. She states,

> My question about the process helped provide Kelly with a framework within which to examine her ideas about the role reading played in her writing. The sequential nature of the questions encouraged her to

> express . . . Such questioning encourages children to explore on their own. (p. 57)

Dyson and Genishi (1982) state that writing is becoming more acceptable as an "interactive process that can develop in varying contexts of the classroom" (p. 126). These researchers present case studies of two grade one students (one boy and one girl) who interact with the teacher in very different ways as they learn to write. They found that the children had different but equally valid approaches to writing. They both used oral language to help them write words. Listening to others' questions and comments and their own speech helped them with the transition from oral to written language. For the boy, questions from others had a definite effect on his writing. In contrast, the girl did not appear to be affected but "it is possible that others' . . . questioning, as well as their unaccepted advice, allowed her new insights into written language" (p. 131). Their findings have relevance for the use of conferences in the primary grades. Perhaps an interactive classroom with a variety of peer, teacher, and group conferencing is best for writing development.

Turnbill (1982) examined the conference approach to writing in twenty-seven Australian schools. Her investigations were instigated by the work of Graves during his visit to Australia in 1980. Her findings were published in a book entitled, No Better Way To Teach Writing (1982). She describes the how-to's for setting up a writing program as well as a variety of positive teacher comments about the methodology. Turnbill (1982), along with the teachers involved in the study, maintains that the conference approach is one of the best ways to increase children's belief in themselves and their abilities.

Parry and Hornsby (1985), along with other members of a task force, examined writing research, their own teaching experience, and observed young children writing. The classroom observations and literature reviews began in 1980 and resulted in a popularized teacher's manual about the "Conferencing Approach" to writing with young children. Four years later, Parry and Hornsby (1985) compiled an updated, refined text for broader circulation. This more complete text suggests a wider variety of reasons to conference besides editing such as "Evaluation, Encouragement, Attitude/Audience, Clarification, Addition, General Impression," and

so forth. Like Holdaway (1980), Parry and Hornsby (1985) believe that developmental learning, such as conferencing within process writing,

> is supported by sympathetic interactive adults who praise often and punish very seldom. Correction is positively presented only for "mistakes" which are inappropriate to the stage of development. It occurs in a most secure social environmronment, resonant of optimism for the learner's ultimate success. (Holdaway, 1989, p. 14)

In Cambourne and Turnbill's (1987) naturalistic research project they, along with other members of The Center for Literacy at the University of Wollangong, observed seven classrooms of kindergarten children. The findings collected over "several years" formed the basis of their publication. They describe conferencing as a "strategy in which children ask for assistance from the teacher" (p. 23). It is suggested that "seeking information from the teacher" (p. 24) is the way conferences are utilized by young writers. Harste, Short, and Burke (1988) agree with this role of conferencing

as they believe teacher-student conferences are only one small component of the "editing cycle."

In contrast Parry and Hornsby (1985), Atwell (1987), Graves (1983b), and Calkins (1986) believe conferencing is more than simply getting "kids to revise."

> There isn't any <u>one</u> point to be made by a writing conference. A whole range of different kinds of talk, suiting different purposes, goes on in a writing workshop. The nature of talk in my writing workshop depends on what a writer needs or what I need as a teacher of writers. (Atwell, 1987, p. 88)

These same researchers believe that editing conferences are important but that they are only one example of the many varieties of conferences that can occur between a teacher and a child. "Each stage of the writing allows for, and demands, interaction. These interactions, called conferences, are critical components of the process" (Pelligrini and Inglis, 1987, p. 26).

Some writer/researchers such as Graves (1983b) and Calkins (1986) categorize conferences that teachers use. Each categorization is unique however, the essential elements involved in the conferences are the same. First, the conference is to be led by the child (Graves, 1983b), and second it should fill the young writer's need(s) (Calkins, 1986). There are, Calkins suggests, moments in which a teacher's sole purpose for a conference may be simply to listen and respond as a human to a human.

Graves (1983b) and Calkins (1986) both state that conferencing is "tricky", takes practice and has no "absolutes." Their books serve as "frameworks" which help teachers develop their own "style" and, in Murray's (1982) words, encourage teachers to have "faith, faith that my students have something to say and a language in which to say it (p. 157).

Roles in Writing Conferences

> A child doesn't make his own mind. It's just there. Your job is to see what's in it. Your only allowable comment is one of natural interest in what he is writing. (Ashton-Warner, 1963, p. 53).

In 1963 Ashton-Warner wrote that the role of the writing teacher "boils down to whether or not she is a good conversationalist; whether or not she has the gift of wisdom to listen to another; the ability to draw out and preserve that others line of thought" (p. 53). At the time, her view of a writing teacher's role was not common, new, or well accepted. Challenging the traditional role of a teacher, Ashton-Warner writes of her personal experience with Maori children in New Zealand. The creative, "organic" role of a teacher within her methodology stipulates that teachers help young writers to grow according to their individual developmental patterns and scale. For her, the role of the teacher has only one purpose, that of calling on the child's own resources "which in practice means that she must have the patience and wisdom to learn, to watch and wait, until the individual child's 'line of thought' becomes apparent" (1963, p. 12).

Schutz (1973) describes roles in interaction as "common sense" constructs which are "reciprocal" and "rational." Therefore:

> even the simplest interaction in common life presupposes a series of common-sense constructs - in this case constructs of the others anticipated

> behavior - all of them based on the idealization that the actor's in-order-to motives will become because-motives of his partners and vice versa. We shall call this idealization that of the reciprocity of motives. (p.23)

The motives and purposes for each exchange or conference vary according to the individual's "because" and "in-order-to" motives as well as the piece of writing.

> Motives which involve ends to be achieved, goals sought for, are termed "in-order-to" motives; motives which are explained on the basis of the actor's background, environment, or psychic disposition are called "because" motives. (Schutz, 1973, p. XXXIV)

In conferences, both the child and the teacher come with a variety of motives. Neither one is able to pre-plan roles as the motives of each person involved are unknown and develop/evolve as the conference progresses. Roles are created, exchanged, and changed as the "reciprocity" of the conference continues.

Britton (1970) writes that "it is only in speech that we establish and modify our roles in relation to each other" (p. 22). Schutz (1973) and Britton (1970) describe the exchange of roles as reciprocal.

> You might start by asking a question, which you then develop: if I interrupted you, you might then interrupt me and you in this way take over the role at the moment assigned to me. (Britton, 1970, p. 22)

In reference to "the task" of writing and conferencing, Britton (1970) believes that "the quality of what is done relies upon the quality of relations between those who are cooperating in doing it" (p. 22). He says that talk is what links writing, learning, and humans together.

> In practical terms, then, all that the children write, your response to what they write, their response to each other, all this takes place afloat a sea of talk. Talk is what provides the links between you and them and what they have written, between what they have written and each other. (p. 29)

The importance of communication between a teacher and his/her students is integral to the learning and development of both.

Throughout the writing crisis of the 1970's, research concerned with the role of the teacher shifted in focus from "different kinds of response to student writing "(Freedman, 1981). The most significant theories concerned with this more collaborative role were related to conferencing (Graves, 1978).

Graves believes that in a conference a teacher takes either the role of "advocate" or "adversary." Using examples of each, he notes the importance of the setting and non-verbal language. He encourages a "mirror-like" role for the teacher and a leadership role for the young writer. "Action in conferences is redefined as intelligent reaction" (1983b, p. 127)

> Writing demands discipline, the waiting response. The marvellous part about waiting for children, and helping them to teach us is what we learn ourselves . . . .
> They send us scurrying for reference books when they reverse roles and ask us questions. (1983b, p. 128)

Through the 1980's, increasing numbers of teachers were becoming aware of, and experimenting with, a more collaborative role in teaching writing. In this role, conferencing was an essential element. During this time, literature and research concerned with roles in conferencing increased significantly to feed the growing interest of educators. Bissex (1982), Koch (1982), Parry and Hornsby (1985), Calkins (1986), Atwell (1987), and Cambourne and Turnbill (1987) all believe that the role of the writing teacher must be "helping", "encouraging", and "creative." They would all agree that:

> The writing teacher must be prepared to spend time talking to really know each individual and helping them realize that they have something of worth to offer. Everything does if you dig deep enough! The teacher must <u>believe</u> that talk is not a waste of time, since talk establishes the initial foundations of acceptance. (Parry and Hornsby, 1985, p. 31)

Conferencing Response

Responding: To Literature and to Conferencing

> The commonest idea among authors and readers is that they share in the creation of an imagined world. (Benton and Fox, 1985, p. 2)

The literature concerning the interplay between an adult and child while reading seems to parallel the interaction in a writing conference. Both are personal, intense literary experiences in which both people block out what Tolkien (1965) calls the "Primary World." The authors words (text or spoken) create a " Secondary World" in which both people participate together. By using these terms, Tolkien (1965), and Benton and Fox (1985), describe reading interaction in a unique way. The difference is that in a writing conference the child is the author. An extensive search of the literature revealed that there are no studies describing the nature of conference interaction. As a result, the following paragraphs concerning the nature of reading response parallel that

of the writing conference with young children. Graves (1983b), Emig (1983), and Calkins (1986) agree that writing and reading are inseparable therefore, literature concerned with one is meshed into the other.

Tolkien (1965) describes the "world" within book interaction, between an adult and a child, as "Secondary" and the happenings outside of that interaction as "Primary." It is a "state of mind" that the adult and child both chose to enter. Within this Secondary world, the adult and young child involved are not aware of the happenings occurring outside this world. Windicott (1971) states that this "mental playground" that authors, writers, and audiences of stories experience offers "security" and "freedom." Benton and Fox (1985) write that "the trick is to shut out one world to enter another" (p. 4). If something occurs that pulls the child or adult out of their Secondary world the "spell", "magic", or "art" is broken (Tolkien, 1965). After being distracted or pulled away "you are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary world from the outside" (Tolkien, 1965, p. 8).

Tolkien (1965) suggests this "limbo" is created by two unique individuals who chose to join intimately in an "intermediate state of mind" (p. 7). Benton and Fox (1985) extend this to describe the interaction as play in a game with "rules and conventions." They state that "whatever physical contortions we get up to we can play the game in our imaginative style, take our own pleasure from it in the way we want and stop playing when we choose" (p. 14).

Benton and Fox (1985) believe that within the Secondary world there "lies an area of play activity between the readers inner reality and the outer reality of the worlds on the page" (p. 5).

The following paragraphs describe literature related to the happenings and activities of children following conferencing. Most of the literature available is from teacher/researchers who have described their classroom through their own experience as teachers of young writers, or their own efforts to compose as writers.

Responding: Children After Composing

> Different readers responses to a story [or a conference] thus have enough in common to be

> shared while remaining highly individual. The literature classroom becomes a place where pupils may gain from others' responses while preserving their sense of uniqueness as readers [or writers]. (Benton and Fox, 1985, p. 5)

Graves (1983b) states that when he is at "a dead end" he busies himself with other activities but, he is always "thinking and hoping" about his writing. He writes that he often cleans his office area, uses the telephone and/or eats. After awhile he returns to "write some more." It is suggested by Calkins (1986) and Newman (1985) that children need freedom to involve themselves in a broad range of activities during the composing process. The composing process includes pre and post writing. Like Graves, young writers require time, space, and opportunity to process what has happened during a recent conference or with their piece of writing. In Brandt's (1982) words, "knowledge must be manipulated" (p. 58). Newman (1985) states that young writers need to be able to talk, move, and play, as adult writers do, in order to think through their piece(s) of writing and/or recent conference(s). Newman maintains that children need to be allowed to make aside comments, ask

someone for their reaction to a piece of writing, talk to themselves, or move around the room. She also believes that if young writers are not permitted to move throughout the room they will be stifled from doing activities that are helpful for them. She states that "we needed to provide as complete and as complex a learning environment as we could so that students could engage with the activities in whatever way was useful to them" (p. 3). Calkins (1980) describes the needs of young writers as a "cycle." She believes that children alternate between playful involvement with the process and critical concern with the product. This is the writer's cycle of the craft.

> Mastery of conventions and concerns with audience and final product are part of the process of play . . . . [When] children rediscover their playful roots, their writing process becomes qualitatively similar to the process of most professional writers experience. (Calkins, 1980, p. 213)

Tolkien's (1965) and Benton and Fox's (1985) ideas about the Secondary world can be integrated with Brandt's (1982), Newman's

(1985), and Calkins' (1980) thoughts concerning freedom and play in the composing process. This integration leads to the proposition that young writers seen to require a playful, freeing, processing time to readjust to the Primary World. This premise will be expanded upon in the discussion of the findings found in Chapter Five. The next chapter will present the methodology utilized in this study.

Chapter III

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

> It is precisely my position in space and time which is the primary consideration. The elements of the scene are before me, the aspects I consider marginal are marginal with regard to what I deem central, and the knowledge I possess of the surroundings is independent of my physical placement in the world. (Natanson, 1973, p. 30)

Design

This is a descriptive study utilizing qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. Miles and Huberman (1984) state that in a descriptive study you do not

> know the perimeters or dynamics of a social setting with any certainty. So heavy front-end

> instrumentation or closed-ended devices are inappropriate. (p. 43)

In their discussion of participant observational techniques, Bissex and Bullock (1987) state that "there is knowledge of a different sort to be gained through empathy and involvement, through systematic observation that seeks to understand the experience of other persons rather than their behavior as objects" (p. 13). Diesing (1971) writes that one who is not emotionally involved will be unable to empathize, and therefore will miss much of the meaning of what he sees.

Nature of the Study

This study is descriptive in nature. The descriptions are based on findings from audio-taped conferences, informal conversations and interviews, a teacher journal, samples of children's writing, and field notes. This study takes place in a grade one classroom and the participants included the teacher and four of his students.

A case study format is used to describe the teacher, the children, conference interactions, and the happenings following conference interaction.

Selection of Participants

Teacher

The criteria for selection of the teacher is that this person utilize individual writing conferences regularly as a part of his or her writing program. In addition, there must be large blocks of time each day for the children to write, and the focus is on the process of childrens' writing rather than of the product. A list of seven possible teachers was created based on suggestions from three university professors, two primary school teachers, and two language arts graduate students. Following visits to all of the classrooms, all but two classrooms were deemed inappropriate as they either did not use conferences regularly or have writing class daily. Of the two remaining potential rooms, one teacher was much more comfortable and receptive to having a researcher in the room. The appropriate channels and personnel were contacted and permission to carry through with the study was obtained.

Children

The teacher selected four first time grade one children, two girls and two boys, who would reflect a range of writing ability (one high, two medium, one low), levels of success, and a range of interests. The entire class of children provided written permission from their parents, and gave oral permission to the researcher to involve them.

Grade one children have been chosen in order to eliminate influences such as years of instruction or approaches to writing. Also, my experience as a teacher and interest is in the early childhood years when children are believed to have fewer preconceived notions about writing. The parent(s) of the four children, although they can have a great impact on their children's writing, were not included in this study.

Rapport

Taylor (cited in Brinson, 1988, p. 12) notes that "It is incumbent upon the researcher to establish a rapport within the research setting that will not impede such openness and honesty." For the purpose of this study, a four week period was believed to

be sufficient time for observer effects to be minimized and rapport to be established. The week prior to the observation period was used to develop rapport with the children and to let the children and the teacher adjust to my presence and equipment. It also provided time for me to sensitize myself to the school classroom, students, and teacher.

Methodology

The methodology utilized in this study takes into account the complixity and dynamic interaction of a grade one classroom environment. This is done using triangulation (Denzin, 1978, Guba, 1981) to link all of the components related to the children (interviews, conversations, writing samples, and conferences) the teacher (interviews, conversations, a journal, and conferences) and the researcher (conferences, observations and a journal). Through description the findings of each component are integrated.

Observation

Five consecutive weeks were spent in the grade one classroom. During the first week, I did not collect any data as the purpose was

to reduce observer effects and establish rapport with the teacher and the children. The following four week period was devoted to collecting and analyzing data.

Spradley (1980) states that objectivity depends upon a subjective experiencing of the event. He describes participant observation as a valid way of understanding or "coming to know." While there are others who view this role as limiting, I do not. Relationships are an important component of the learning process. As well, observation and audiotapes are valid ways of gaining understanding about interaction during conferencing and the happenings following conferencing.

I carefully observed four children as they conferenced with their teacher and busied themselves after the conference. During the conferences, my role was to observe, take field notes, and audio-tape the dialogues. The goal was to be involved as little as possible in the conference interaction. Descriptive, detailed field notes, photographs, and/or audio-tapes were used to document the activities children chose following conferencing with their teacher.

Weekly summaries of conference interaction and the childrens' activities following conferencing were kept.

Interviews

Both the teacher and the children involved were interviewed during the four week data collection period. The teacher was interviewed alone. The children were interviewed as a group of four, in pairs, and alone. The pair and group interviews led to valuable discussions between the children that could not have taken place in the same way with only one subject.

According to Weber (1986), "The interview is a special instance of human dialogue" (p. 68). She states that an interview is a "shared experience . . . [in which] the interviewer and the participant are both caught up in the phenomenon being discussed, when both are trying and wanting to understand" (p. 69).

For the teacher and me, the interview was an important component of our "shared experience." Many comments such as, "These interviews are neat, I feel like I'm learning so much about teaching and writing and, well - you too!" and along with the fact

that he joined a University writing class during the study reveals our mutual search for understanding.

The interviews with the teacher facilitated the linking, confirming, and questioning connections between the journal, transcripts, and informal conversations. With the children, the interviews provided a forum for relating and tying together their conference transcripts, writing examples, and informal conversations. These open-ended interviews provided

> the opportunity to be known, to gain self-understanding, to give something to the other, as well as a chance to delight in the intersubjective nature of human understanding. Perhaps one accepts because to trust that "this other will not exploit me" is part of what it means to be human. (Weber, 1986, p. 67)

Teacher Journal

For the duration of the study, the teacher kept a daily journal. According to Berthoff (1987), "writing as a way of knowing lets us

represent ideas so that we can return to them and assess them" (p. 11). The teacher included general personal reflections about the school day and comments about the writing conferences of the four children in the study. Heinze (1987) states that "the journal is an instrument of recording which enables a person to see in writing what is going on his head" (p. 492). I believe, as Heinze, the journal gives a shade of understanding about what is going on in the teacher's thoughts so that the writing and thinking while journaling is not restricted in any way; the journal is unstructured and open-ended.

The journal was used to support and/or extend informal comments, transcripts of conferences, and interview data.

Informal Conversation

Knights (1985) writes that "reflection is a two way process; without an appropriate 'reflection' it cannot occur at all" (p. 85). The informal, reflective comments made by the teacher were noted in my field notes and recorded if possible. "Although educators seem to agree that conversational dialogue is a good thing, for some reason it tends to be thwarted once children attend school" (Shuy,

1987, p. 890). Recognizing this value of the social dimensions of talking, I listened as carefully as possible when the teacher and children were speaking. As Knights states, "reflection is most profound when it is done aloud with the aware attention of another person" (1985, p. 85). I served as the audience for many of the conversations of the teacher and the children. These informal conversations were restricted to times when they did not disrupt the flow of the classroom activities. In most instances the teacher or children initiated these conversations. Sometimes, I asked students to describe what they were doing, thinking, and/or writing and why. When appropriate, I asked them to tell me about their perceptions concerning aspects of conferencing. All of these conversations were transcribed verbatim.

Conference Audio-Taping

To supplement my field notes on the conference and happenings following conferencing, I recorded the teacher and students' interactions. The recorder was placed in front of the teacher and child. All interactions were transcribed verbatim and organized by date, time, and student involved. Then they were filed following

the corresponding field notes. These transcriptions were read, discussed, and used in the analysis and writing up of the study.

Children's Writing Samples

Tangible connections to the transcripts, informal conversations, and interviews were drawn from the children's written pieces. Each day a copy of each child's writing was obtained. When a child continued on a piece for more than one day the previous work was also photocopied to provide background and a context for further analysis of the complete piece. Copies of "published" pieces were also kept if a child took the piece to that point.

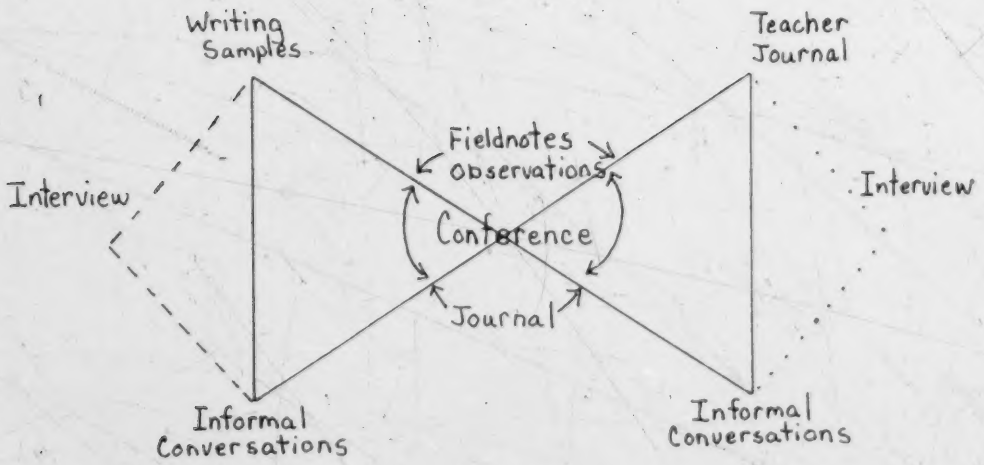
Fieldnotes/Journal

I combined a personal journal with my fieldnotes. It was an important component for me as I could integrate daily my reflections with all the other facets of the study. This component of my study helped me explore, absorb, and connect my thoughts and findings on paper.

Analysis of Findings

As a framework for organizing and analyzing the data collected, Denzin (1978) and Guba's (1981) concept of triangulation was used (see Figure 1). The teacher data included transcribed conferences, a journal, informal conversations, and interviews. Denzin and Guba believe that the quality of an inquiry grows as more triangulations are employed for collection and analysis of data.

Figure I



The happenings or activities following conferencing were analyzed separately for each child in a matrix. Therefore, the types of happenings on each child's matrix are individual. In the discussion of these findings (Chapters Five and Six), each child's activities following conferencing are discussed.

Informal conversation, interviews, and the teacher's journal were analyzed as they related to the nature of the conference interaction and the activities following conferencing. These comments (oral or written) were summarized and used to extend the findings. Interviews and informal conversations with the teacher, as well as his journal were all transribed. Mr. Nelson then validated these transcripts. The transcriptions were then validated by him. In the same way, interviews, writing samples, and informal conversations were validated with the children whenever possible. According to Miles and Hubberman (1984) this process allows patterns and themes to emerge. It also synthesizes the data and aides in the organization of the findings.

Educators such as Kantor, Kirby, and Goetz (1981) and Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) feel that research needs to be

applicable for classroom teachers and administrators. If it is not, it can not achieve its purpose as educational research

> Educational inquiry should engage researchers and consumers in dialogue rather than isolate them from each other. The findings of descriptive, qualitative, naturalistic, and holistic approaches are often not readily interpretable and couched in the language of English professionals. Such research strategies tend to work with wholes rather than parts, with describable phenomena rather than inferential quantification, to use the language of the classroom teacher rather than the discourse of the laboratory researcher (Kanter, Kirby, and Goetz, 1981, p. 292).

In this study I sought to use clear, concise language void of too many specialized terms or concepts.

Although this study is limited to one teacher and his classroom, my goal is to increase understanding of classroom dialogue, the

nature of conferencing, and the happenings that follow. Britton (1970) writes,

> we construct a representation of the world as we experience it, and from this representation, this cumulative record of our past, we generate expectations concerning the future; expectations which, as moment by moment the future becomes the present, enables us to interpret the present. (p. 12)

Chapter IV

CONFERENCE INTERACTION

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the main findings of the study. These are presented in sections beginning with a profile of the teacher Mr. Nelson and the four children Tony, Warren, Anita, and Mandy. In the teacher's profile I include an introduction, a description of his writing program, and his use of conferencing. For each child there is an individual profile followed by a description of their perceptions about writing and conferencing. The remainder of the chapter covers the roles in conference interaction and the teacher's "dilemma" in conferencing.

Profile: Mr. Nelson

Introduction

Mr. Nelson is described by his peers and principal as energetic, humorous, and hardworking. He received his Bachelor of Education and Early Childhood Diploma from a large western

university. Following graduation he interned in a kindergarten classroom for one year. Happily married and nearing thirty years of age he recently completed his fourth year of teaching. He has taught mixed groupings from Kindergarten to grade two. During the time the study took place he had a grade one/two. He taught every subject except music.

Writer's Workshop

One of the overall school goals is to stress the process of children's writing more than the product. Mr. Nelson believes this is integral to the success of his writing program. He is proud of the writing program that he says works for him and his students. "It's always evolving but I feel good about how it works." The children have "writing workshop" every morning from approximately 9:10 a.m. to 10:20 a.m. They each have a notebook in which they write. When the decision is made to publish a piece of writing, it is put on a computer disc and printed out in primary type. Finally, the young author binds and illustrates the "book."

Conferencing

Conferencing is used daily at all stages of the writing process. Conferences usually begin in one of two ways; the writer either shares where she or/he is in the writing process or the writer reads a piece of work to the teacher. These comments usually lead into the child expressing what he or she needs. Usually, children go to Mr. Nelson at "the round yellow table." Other times Mr. Nelson "checks in" with them at their desk to "touch base" at least once every three days.

> I've worked hard at making it a pleasurable experience. My primary goal, of course, is to have them leave the conference writing and seeing themselves as writing better or more correctly. But also, besides that, running parallel and perhaps even more important is that I want them to leave feeling better about themselves.

Mr. Nelson feels he has had a successful conference if he can sense that the child is happy with him/herself and has made improvement. "I'll ask them. Do you see improvement? Or, what are you learning this week?" During informal conversations

Mr. Nelson commented more than once about how much he learns from the children's writing. Calkins (1983) states that these writing conferences are "in reality language conferences" (p.124). She, like Mr. Nelson, found that "although we assumed that their [conferences] purpose was to help the writer, in reality, the learning was collaborative and mutual" (p. 124).

Mr. Nelson describes himself as a "kind of cheerleader, Rah! Rah! Write, explore, give me anything you've got! I mean like, the expectations vary but, I want them to feel great and see themselves as growing." He sees his role during conferencing as that of a facilitator.

> They'll show me what they're ready for next and it's my job to highlight that and to pick up on what they want. It might seem too casual to some but, I truly believe it. My whole philosophy, I don't know if it's right or wrong, but I expect that what they write they can read. To write it, it must mean something to them, therefore I must make it important then to me.

Mr. Nelson describes conferencing as "intense, exhausting, personal, necessary, and--well, a dilemma." The "dilemma" is always "what to say and/or do to help a child. Every child is so different as a person and every writing piece's purpose and stage is also that. It's really a dilemma. "Mr. Nelson states that he always tries to end the conference saying thank you to the child. I want them to know that I appreciate them and that it's been a pleasurable learning experience for me to be in their company."

Profiles of the Children

CASE 1: Tony

Personal Description

Tony is a medium sized boy with large expressive, brown eyes, curly hair, a broad base of knowledge, and a sensitive nature. His oral and written language skills exceed that of most of his classmates. According to Mr. Nelson, his "matter of fact way of thinking, talking, and writing" is his most unique quality. He only writes expository pieces and loves books, especially ones about space. Besides books, Tony likes soccer, dancing, and telling jokes. School in his words is "fun and easy--except for boring coloring."

Fine motor skills, such as typing, he handles with ease. Socially he is well adept and well liked. He is often chosen to be "captain" however, it does not take much conflict for his tears to begin to flow. One morning, while waiting for a bingo game board to be handed to him by another child (who had forgotten him), he said, "Excuse me! But could someone (he squinted his eyes at the child) please show me some respect!" (He raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips to wait for the response).

Perceptions of Writing

Tony had no trouble beginning his writing and most days he requires little preparation time. He has two favourite places where he writes. Most often he sits under Mr. Nelson's desk using the chair as a desk top or he sits at his own desk. One morning he said. "I like writing and keep writing because, like, there's more to come . . . like, like the space story I'm working on write now." Tony often wriggles quite a bit when in his seat writing. Mr. Nelson describes his writing as sporadic. "He's inspired for a few days and then dry for a while, off and on." Tony enjoys working near others but finds co-authoring "difficult" as he only wants "to write 'bout space" and feels he does "all the work."

His criteria for judging a good piece of writing are "lots of words and information, good language so you know that you know which language it is" and that "the spelling is right." In his own writing (Appendix B1, is a sample), he often takes risks with difficult words. When "stuck" he will go to a friend and show him/her his piece. He either reads the piece to his friend or his friend reads it aloud back to him. Then he goes back to his desk and writes.

Perceptions of Conferencing

For Tony, conferencing is a time to "sit back, relax, talk, and write stories." One morning, following a conference, he turned to me and said, "You know, I take care with my words so Mr. Nelson will let me get on the computer and, well, the book might actually get published and copyrighted like Moby Dick!"

For Mr. Nelson, conferencing with Tony is at times "hard . . . he seems to pay close attention to what I'm talking about, you know, then I think he's sort of off by himself. It's like I reel him in like a kite, try to give him a little of something, and then off he

goes." When asked about conferencing with Mr. Nelson, Tony stated, "Well, talking to Mr. Nelson is like, well, you must know. It's fun!" When probed for why it is "fun", he continued, "Well, because, like Mr. Nelson talks to you and Mr. Nelson makes you feel, feel GOOD!"

There are two components of conferencing that Tony likes very much. First he said, "I like to share ideas, in conferences like, you know, you don't have to use their ideas 'cause, you know, it is your stuff." Second, Tony said, "I like to read Mr. Nelson what I wrote and tell him what I did--I like everything about conferencing."

CASE 2: Warren

Personal Description

Warren is a rather tall, lanky child who loves to jump, "pretend skate" (slide on the floor without shoes), and touch everything. Mr. Nelson says that Warren's

> arms and legs are always bent and moving and when most children are writing he's laying on the floor looking like he's dreaming. He's just slow to

get out of the blocks. He often still has trouble reading his own piece after publication.

Warren is a patient boy with a happy-go-lucky attitude about most things. For example, one morning Mr. Nelson reminded him to please put his glasses on as the class sat on the floor to read a blackboard message. He responded with "Oh yeah!" and with a big smile hit himself on each side of his head. He then hopped up, tripped over two people (by accident) and spilled his desk drawer contents on the floor as he tried to find his glasses and get them on his head properly.

Socially, Warren is not an Emily Post. He is a follower in a larger group and spends a lot of time alone. He prefers pictures, globes, playing with water, and so forth over reading or writing activities. His oral language is excellent and he is willing to take risks in new games, activities, or experiences.

Perceptions of Writing

Writing workshop each day is not Warren's favourite time. "Writing? Oh, it's just tough, ya know," he commented as I sat

beside him one morning. Most often he can be found lying on the floor in front of his book, holding his head in one hand and his pencil in the other. Rarely does he hold a position for more than one minute. Usually he has something with him such as a pop-up book (he has a favourite dinosaur one), a globe, or a toy he touches and talks to. Warren is often the last child to take out his writing workshop book and sometimes for days he will not write a thing. When he does write (Appendix B2 is a sample), it is difficult to decipher. However, when he is asked to read a piece of his writing, Mr. Nelson receives a story with a beginning, middle, and end, characters, a setting, and a story line. Mr. Nelson says, "Warren constantly surprises me. He's got such an oral flair for storytelling. He possesses an incredible ability to tell them. It's just that he cannot seem to get it down on paper."

Warren's criteria for a good quality piece of writing includes a "message" that can be seen with no backwards letters, no scribble marks, and use of inventive spelling. When asked how he would know a piece of writing was good, he replied,

> They, they want to give a message to you and
> well, you want to know how I know it's good

writing well, 'cause like you see the writing and like you don't see the writing is backwards or anything (pause) or anything like that, that's why you know it's good. (pause) Oh, oh, and you just scribble if you make something new and you should take care and erase it. And (pause) and you could also use your own spelling.

Perceptions of Conferencing

"I just have a good feeling when he comes here or calls me up," Warren said when asked what conferencing is like. Mr. Nelson often comments after a conference with Warren that he is so "full of surprises" because his stories are so complete and well developed orally but on paper they are often a string of letters. What fascinates Mr. Nelson is that a day later Warren can "re-read" this superb story almost word for word from the string of letters.

When asked what happens during a conference, Warren said, "Sometimes Mr. Nelson rewrites my story like, while I read my copy. Then we have two copies. Then, I fix up his copy so it's our story now. See!" Mr. Nelson feels he is helping Warren by writing

down his dictated story so others can read it. "Conferencing is draining for Warren just as writing is. So I try to ease his struggle by writing out for him a few of his best pieces." Although writing isn't Warren's favourite activity, he likes it "because (pause) I like, the thing I really like is doing math and like you want to know about conferencing? Well, it, it just makes me feel good!" He once told me while waiting in line for recess that he had once had a conference that was "bad." "It was like, but it wasn't in this school. It was in a different school (pause). Like, it wasn't very good. I, it was just really complicated. Okay?"

CASE 3: Anita

Personal Description

Anita is a bouncy, social, spirited girl who is conscientious and particular about her work and play. Mr. Nelson describes her as "a neat, meticulous, butterfly." Usually she is smiling and in a group of friends. Her desk and notebooks are kept neat as is her hair, which is done up each morning in buns, braids, or curls. Taking risks, losing, and/or making mistakes are not easy for Anita. She is very rule conscious and looks down upon anything "wrong." Mr. Nelson said, that "at the beginning of the year her oral and written

language proficiency was low." However, he states that, she had made incredible gains in trying to spell new words, writing more complex stories, and experimenting with written conventions of language. In fact, she has surpassed half her class.

Anita shows a lot of interest in other authors' work. She will often read other's work in the library computer room and classroom. She commented to me one morning while she read a display on a bulletin board, "I'm just getting ideas." For example, after Mandy, who sat across from her, finished reading Anita her story about a bird's nest, Anita wrote a story about birds and nests too.

Perceptions of Writing

One morning I asked Anita what writing was like. She replied, "Writing is good--I like everything--school and stuff. I'm good at writing but (pause) I don't know why, really." Mr. Nelson describes her as "quite a focused writer." Her usual writing place is at her own desk with very good posture. She does not move around much during writer's workshop except to sharpen her pencil that has to be "pointed" to write. Anita always has three or four pieces of writing she is working on simultaneously, such as lists of people

and things, stories, poems, and letters. (Appendix B3 is a sample.) She writes something in her book everyday. She often blocks out the activity around her and intensely works on her own piece. Sometimes she will hold her head on one side and stare out the window, then, all at once begin writing again.

Her criteria for a good piece of writing is neatness and good quality printing. She states that a good piece is "neat and (pause) just has good printing." One morning when writer's workshop was ending, Anita asked Mr. Nelson if she could miss the next activity to do some more writing. He told her that was acceptable. She sat alone at her desk and wrote for over thirty minutes.

Perceptions of Conferencing

> If someone new comes to this room, tell them first, you are very careful, nice to our class, and you will say that about our writing, careful with what you say!

Anita enjoys talking about conferencing and often comments on what she likes about conferencing and how it makes her feel.

> It feels good to be in a conference. I like conferencing because after we talk and look I go back to my desk or the computer. I like to read Mr. Nelson what I wrote and tell what I did, I like it all!

In a group conference with the three other children in the study, she had the following exchange.

Anita: If I were a teacher, when I conferenced I'd talk and be interesting!

Warren: He [Mr. Nelson] makes us encourage, feel good. Right?

Anita: Yeah! And he also makes us interesting compliments.

Anita seems to thrive on time spent conferencing with Mr. Nelson and writing on her own.

CASE 4: Mandy

Personal Description

Mandy is a shy, patient, rather plain girl who loves to colour. She is of average height with straight, short brown hair. Her interests include birds, skipping, and painting. Mr. Nelson describes her as "a bit of a dreamer" and "not a big producer." She often stares off and away from her work laying on a carpet under the paint easels as she writes. She explained to me that she likes to write under places where her feet can move. Mandy is quite a private girl with her writing until she goes to Mr. Nelson. When with him, she usually has a lot to tell him beyond what she has written and has questions to ask him.

More than any of the other three children, Mandy seems to link everything she experiences to the theme of the story she is writing. For example, on the top of her bingo board she drew "a bird and her nest with me looking-see". In art she made a "bird nest" out of peas and toothpicks. When playing pictionary, her first guess for over a month was a word related to birds nests, and at recess (for over two weeks) she and two friends created a bird nest

game. Each day more examples reflected how her thoughts, words, and activities were connected to her writing.

Mandy enjoys being read to and looking at books, however, reading is not her first choice for fun. For three weeks she only borrowed books "with birds in them" from the library. One day, while walking beside her down a hall her partner asked her, "Mandy do you sorta like books?" Her reply was, "Yes, of course, but not all day long." They concluded by giggling about their words.

Perceptions of Writing

> I tell visitors to our room, you are nice to Mr. Nelson and--but--or you'll be nice to us and you will see, that we have good writing and you'll see I like learning how to write and I like writing stories to learn it to publish.

Mandy is a steady writer who likes "coloring the same as writing." Often she asks those around her for help with words. When Mandy feels a piece should be published she is, in Mr.

Nelson's words, "highly motivated to move the project along." Repeatedly she will ask Mr. Nelson, "Can I laminate, color, and bind the book now?" Unlike Anita, Mandy only works on one story at a time and when she drops one, or a piece of one, she rarely gets back to it. As Mandy writes, she sounds out words and whispers to herself what she will write next. Her stories seem to be only the tip of the story she can tell you orally.

Writing, for Mandy, is enjoyable. She is quick to get settled under the easels and to start writing. In her words, her story ideas come from "all the things that happen to me." Unlike the other three children, Mandy uses her small personal dictionary while writing. In fact she keeps it in her writer's workshop workbook for easy reference.

Perceptions to Conferencing

Mandy explained to me one morning how she would rather be "called up" or "checked in on" by Mr. Nelson than initiating the conference herself. Once in a conference, she said she likes showing what she has written and "feels good because he is beside me." Mandy does not appear to need as many conferences once she

knows "the story in her head." Mr. Nelson explained that it took Mandy quite awhile at the beginning of the year before they could carry on a conference conversation as she was rather shy and private about her writing.

Mr. Nelson: Roles In Conference Interaction

Mr. Nelson's cumulative role in writing conferences is that of a facilitator. In discussion and through journaling he describes his overall role as cheerleader. Within this cheerleader role he strives to "model, encourage and keep the child interested and developing as a writer and as a person." It is evident through observation that Mr. Nelson assumes a multitude of specific roles. These can be summarized within the six roles of problem solver and creator, monitor, listener, and responder, teacher, model, and learner. The following paragraphs will describe each of these roles and give examples of how through each role Mr. Nelson tried to meet a child's particular needs.

In the role of problem solver and creator Mr. Nelson attempts to meet each writer's needs in a variety of ways. He tries to match the challenge or solution to what he knows of the child's experience

in writing, personality, interests ability, and so forth. For example, one morning Warren said "I am stuck!" Quickly, Mr. Nelson took into account everything he knows about Warren and writing. He considers Warren's lack of confidence, his reading ability, his excellent verbal ability, his love of pictures (especially cartoons), and his past writings. Mr. Nelson began by asking Warren to tell him his story orally. He then draws, in a cartoon format (Appendix A), what Warren has said. He guides Warren through the beginning, middle, and end if his writing by using questions such as, "What's going to happen now in the middle?" "How will all this excitement come to a close in the ending?"

Mr. Nelson ends the conference by asking Warren if this solves his problem of being stuck. Warren responds with "yes" and the session concludes with the encouraging send off to "Keep up your good story writing!"

In contrast, when Anita tells Mr. Nelson she is "stuck" he recommends she go talk to another child who had found a solution to a similar problem. In this case Mr. Nelson explains that he tried to help Anita in this way because of her personality, his

schedule, her ability and interest in writing, and his intuition that this would be the best way for her to find a possible solution.

On other occasions Mr. Nelson creates a problem for a writer. The following is a description of a conference with Anita in which Mr. Nelson knows that she wants to link two chapters together to create a single story. In order to do this however, he, realizes she needs to modify the characters. One story is about a stranger and the other is about birds in the clouds.

Mr. Nelson: (After hearing Anita read her second chapter) I'm a little confused, Anita. Chapter one we're talking about going up into the clouds and dancing and birds. Then, chapter two is about a stranger who kidnaps a sister. Are they two different stories?

Anita: Well, I'm going to put them together.

Mr. Nelson: How are you going the tie them together?

Anita: I'm going, well, I left this extra page for well, to, to make it.

Mr. Nelson: Okay, you say you're going to tie them together. That will be interesting and a lot of work! I'm anxious to see how you do it!

Anita: Yes. (She closes her book and stands) See you (and walks to a group of friends).

That same day in his journal Mr. Nelson describes how "perplexed" Anita had made him feel by thinking that two very different stories could be one. He hopes his "challenge" to tie them together will not be too much for her. He writes that "It will be interesting to see if she can." Mr. Nelson believes that by allowing Anita "total exploration and play [with words, thoughts, pencil, and paper] in a non-threatening environment that she will find a solution."

Mr. Nelson also encourages young writers by referring them to other writers and their work(s) or by re-wording the problem and asking them how they think they can solve the problem. Mr. Nelson draws on resources such as other people (teachers, classmates and so forth), books, films, television, and the child him/herself to encourage problem solving. A day or so after a problem has been solved, Mr. Nelson will ask the child to explain how and why s/he utilized a particular solution. Within the role of problem solver and creator he tries to match the child with the problem or solution in order to encourage growth and experience in writing.

In the role of monitor Mr. Nelson clarifies expectations, warns, checks, sets controls, and record keeps. This role varies depending on Mr. Nelson's understanding of each child. He states that, "Some need controls and expectations laid out clearly others, don't require close checks and monitoring." Within this monitor role Mr. Nelson observes carefully to be sure the activities the children are involved in are appropriate. For example, when at the conferencing table or walking around the room, Mr. Nelson always situates himself so that he can see what is happening throughout the classroom.

As an audience, Mr. Nelson listens and responds to each child differently. Before he takes on this role, he often asks the child what s/he would like him to listen for. In his responses he tries to include two positive comments and one "I wonder" statement. Depending on the child, the piece of writing, and so forth, Mr. Nelson's responses to the child's story vary from human emotion to editing advice. Knowledge of the child, sensitivity, and common sense are the resources he calls upon when he fulfils this role. The following is a conference Mr. Nelson had with Tony in which the role of an interactive audience is illustrated.

Tony: Hi! (He lays his space story on the table between them.)

Mr. Nelson: It looks like you've worked on your story about space. (He looks at Tony for a response.)

Tony: Yes, a page and two words.

Mr. Nelson: A page and two words! Great, could you read this for me?

Tony: Okay, so, when astronauts ...okay, Um! (He begins to erase and change a word.)

Mr. Nelson: Good, you're editing.

Tony: Wha!

Mr. Nelson: Okay, When astronauts ...

Tony: ...go to space they might get out or stabbed by junk comets or and astroid. You could easily get hurt. (Pause) And ocat, occasionally they could easily get hurt. Ah-no! the they is supposed to be here!

Mr. Nelson: You could easily get hurt and they could occasionally get killed. Is that what you want to say?

Tony: Yeah! Because they could get stabbed or cut even near the eye. (He points to his own eyes.)

Mr. Nelson: Okay.

Tony: And it may get infected! (pause) Okay! (reading) Astronauts have

very hard suits and super computers and a bit of ...I made a mistake here. I was going to say computers here!

Mr. Nelson: Tony, your topic of space and words are super. Do you know what I think?

Tony: No what?

Mr. Nelson: I think you need to read through all this and make sure it sounds smooth for a final revision.

Tony: Oh Yes!

Mr. Nelson: Yes, so, you plan to make this story read smoothly.

Tony: Yeah thanks!

Nr. Nelson: Right on!

Meshed with Mr. Nelson's audience role is his teacher role. During conferencing, Mr. Nelson plans, directs, edits, and instructs young writers. Observations of him showing or explaining how to

make or use something related to the craft of writing are frequent. In this role Mr. Nelson tries to increase children's knowledge of writing. The type of guidance or teaching provided for his young writers is evident in the following conference with Anita concerning quotation marks.

Mr. Nelson: Hi, Anita, what are you going to do today? [in writers' workshop]

Anita: Well, I'm goanna work on this (she pushes her book over so he can see)

Mr. Nelson: Interesting! You tried using some new marks that add to your story!

Anita: Do you mean these? (She points to the quotations marks around Tada,) I saw those in a book.

Mr. Nelson: Interesting. Do you know what those are called?

Anita: No!

Mr. Nelson: Quotations marks. (Anita wrinkles up her nose and eyes). Yes, when someone is talking you put them around the words people are saying in your story. Can I show you here? He shows her an example.)

Anita: Oh!

Mr. Nelson: Keep using those and trying them around words your characters say! Great, Anita! I like to see you trying out new things in your writing.

Anita: Thank you very much!

Mr. Nelson: You are welcome.

The role of teacher often blurs and leads into the role of model through which Mr. Nelson sets standards to be imitated. When discussing his role as model, Mr. Nelson states:

> When I model anything related to the process of writing, I show them how I did it and, if I can,

> how other writers do it. If there is only one way, I call it a rule and those who understand what a rule is should use it in their writing.

As a growing and struggling writer and teacher of writers, Mr. Nelson's role as learner is evident. He attempts to gain understanding through experience, reading, and adult writing classes. He is eager to acquire and improve his writing and teaching of writing. He notes that:

> My own experience as a student of writing and reading about writing has solidified and well, given me analytical backing for how I feel about learning life-long. The more I use my learner role and make the kids aware of my learner role I-well the closer and more the children and I grow and learn together as people.

It appears through comments, observations, and transcripts that these different roles blur together and connect in ways unique to each interaction. The "because" and "in-order-to" motives that

the children and the teacher bring to conferences spark exchanges that are spontaneous and unique.

The Teacher's Dilemma of Responding

> Our first job in a conference, then, is to be a person, not just a teacher. It is to enjoy, to care, and to respond. We cry, laugh, nod, and sigh. We let the writer know she has been heard. (Calkins, 1986, p.118)

During informal conversations Mr. Nelson often speaks of his "dilemma." He describes this dilemma as "the problem of what to say or do to meet a child's needs as a writer in a conference." As well, he questions if a teacher ever truly knows if s/he has helped a young writer. Mr. Nelson states that:

> Many people suggest general types of questions or even specific questions to ask, but that seems so canned because how do they know what Anita or Tony needs today? (pause) When I'm here, and most of the time I'm guessing.

In his journal Mr. Nelson wrote that he believes that children in conferences show him what they need. He explained that it is not always verbalized clearly. The message is often non-verbal in nature, and at times the writer doesn't really know what he or she needs. For example, one morning he decided to call on Warren to see how he was doing. Two days earlier Warren had chosen to write a letter to a classmate who was moving away. As Mr. Nelson pulled a chair beside Warren, he saw the writing. As Warren pulled his book to the right side of his desk, under the arm that his head was resting on, the following conference took place:

Mr. Nelson: How are you doing Warren?

Warren: Well... (squints his eyes, turns his head to the side and looks at Mr. Nelson.)

Mr. Nelson: Are you stuck?

Warren: Wha-sort of.

Mr. Nelson: What with?

Warren: Well, it's...(pause) I'll just read this stuff so far. Okay?

Mr. Nelson: Sure.

Warren: I hope you will have a good time in Argentina. We sure-ly will miss you. (Pauses to look at Mr. Nelson's eyes). Y-O-U are...(long pause)

Mr. Nelson: If she was sitting here beside you what would you say out loud?

Warren: You are nice to play with!

Mr. Nelson: Interesting! Can I take your book? Can I write down what you've said here?

Warren: Okay. I...I think I know what I wrote still--I think what I wrote, I think I know. You are very nice to be with. We will miss you. See! I knew ...I knew what I know! Right?

Mr. Nelson: You betcha! (He finishes printing Warren's sentences.) You're okay now?

Warren: Yeah! I know now!

Mr. Nelson: See you (Mr. Nelson moved to another child).

In that day's journal entry, Mr. Nelson wrote that as Warren read, "I became aware of his sincere effort and thought. So, I quickly scribed his letters as he read/told it to me." Mr. Nelson often scribes or draws pictures (like a cartoon) to help Warren. "Really, I guess sometimes at what they need if they can't tell me and I try my best to figure out what would help them." After a conference Mr. Nelson wondered if his decision to scribe for Warren was intruding, insulting, encouraging, or helpful. During an interview he stated that:

> Responding to a child is really exhausting because I try so hard to listen and do or say what they need. They try so hard and in doing so make themselves very vulnerable.

Mr. Nelson finds defining "response in conferencing" rather difficult. He tries to do this with phrases such as "human dialogue" and "common sense encouragement." He feels that since writing more himself, he can identify more personally with some

of the children's struggles to compose. He also believes that his background in early childhood, where he learned to teach children before implementing prescribed programs in subject areas, has aided him in responding to young writers in appropriate, individual ways.

> Every writer is so different and every piece of writing is too. When we conference they are leaving themselves wide open, you know. They are very vulnerable (pause). I cannot compromise the integrity of--of themselves as writers. My responses must be as well thought out as I can make them and encouraging to their egos.

Mr. Nelson feels that the second component of his "dilemma" is whether or not he is able to find out if his response has been helpful. For him, it is important to "be a writer yourself and have your writing responded to." As a teacher of writing as well as a writer, he believes one learns that some comments, marks, and questions are "just what I need while others are somewhat helpful and then there are those that are ridiculous." For Mr.

Nelson, if a teacher is also a writer, then conferences become a mutual effort for growth as writers. Speaking of his personal experience as a student in a writing course he states:

> You see, with my own writing, like them, in the middle of a piece, I usually think it's pretty good. But, then after I share it with a classmate, I realize, usually, the work I need to do. It's ...well ...you're vulnerable. I can truly empathize, sympathize, cause I live it too--and feel it. I am like them. I hope that through conferencing I give them an ear and hope, like I need when I write.

Mr. Nelson ends most conferences saying, "Thank you." He believes that by closing this way, even if his response is not exactly what the young writers needs, he lets them know "that it has been a pleasurable experience for me to be in their company." The human component of writing is very much an act of giving (Elbow, 1981). By thanking the children for sharing, Mr. Nelson feels he acknowledges, unconditionally, the gifts they have offered.

> The question, of course, is what should we do? We want our students to do what real writers do, and in part this means knowing what it is to do their best and then make their best better. What can we say? (Calkins, 1986, p. 117)

CHAPTER V

ACTIVITIES OF CHILDREN FOLLOWING CONFERENCING

Introduction

> Children are constantly testing hypotheses as they experiment with writing; and those hypotheses are their own, not ours. Children must be able to decide just what it is they need to explore as they try to understand what being a writer involves. (Newman, 1983, p.868)

In this chapter, I discuss my findings concerning the happenings after conferencing. First case studies of the four children are presented. Then, the concept of the time following conferencing as a processing/incubation time is described.

Activities Following Conferencing

Case 1: TONY

While conferencing Tony is focused and full of energy, yet he finishes conferencing the opposite way. After conferencing with Mr. Nelson Tony moves around the room and talks with others in a random, slow-paced manor. He moves from one conversation or activity to another as if he was monitoring what was going on in the room. His conversations do not stay on one topic as long as before and during conferencing. Talking, laughing, and recess are his favorite activities after conferencing. He seems to find these releasing. He says that after recess, "I write and write."

If Tony's conference is early in the writing period, he usually spends fifteen to thirty minutes walking around and talking before he begins to write. However, Mr. Nelson states that if he leaves Tony's conference until after the mid point of writing class he does not get back to his writing. "It takes him that long to readjust, find a focus, and regenerate writing energy." Tony will happily type parts of his writing on the computer immediately following a conference. Tony finds typing "fun" after conferencing. He states, "When we're [Mr. Nelson and Tony] done I like to do

this!" (He pulls his fingers up under his chin and wiggles all his fingers.)

Mr. Nelson usually tries to conference with Tony during the first twenty minutes of the writing period so that Tony has time to get back to writing. Sometimes, however, he meets with Tony last so he can go out for recess immediately after the conference. In this way Mr. Nelson meets Tony's writing process needs and makes the most of the writing period.

Case 2: WARREN

Following conferencing Warren usually shows signs of exhaustion. Often, he gives a blowing sigh and silently slides (in his socks as if on skates) to other activities or takes a long round-about route to his desk. On this extended trip back to his desk he stops to drink, paint, draw, look at books, watch what others are doing, play with blocks, or find the materials he needs for writing (pencil, books, and so forth). Some days these other activities take the rest of the class period. Other days he simply drops his book(s) and pencil at his desk, not minding if they land on the floor, and slides off to the bathroom. Sometimes he lays

on the floor behind his desk and literally goes over what had happened during the conference. He retraces letters, words, and pictures in the air above his book with his finger or with a pencil. Other days he orally repeats parts of the conference conversation. I did not observe him modifying or extending the piece of writing he had talked about in his conference, nor did I observe him beginning a new piece of writing. The paintings, block creations, and so forth that he usually engages himself in following conferencing are often dramatic variations of portions of the story he is writing. For example, while he was in the process of writing about a mouse and a dinosaur he played with blocks, a small plastic mouse, and a dinosaur. He rehearsed possible new portions of the story and played through segments he had already written.

For Warren, creative expression through drama, painting, and play seem to help connect the invisible components of his thoughts to the visible world of physical objects. All of Warren's activities after conferencing are forms of play that seem to help him in the writing process. The tracing of drawings and letters are his way of modelling, creating, and learning. Mr. Nelson

describes Warren's activities after conferencing as "coasting and coping." "After a conference Warren is exhausted, he needs a break. He works in spurts and starts...I truly believe he is processing his learning and thoughts."

For Warren the activities following his conferencing have a vital role in his writing process. His play seems to allow him to sort out his thoughts, and develop ideas, and work out what he would like to communicate and express.

Case 3: ANITA

After conferencing with Mr. Nelson Anita has two general types of routines. Most days she returns to her desk and talks to those nearby about anything from her writing or latest conference to the pin on her sweater. The time she spends talking, playing X's and O's, or manipulating puppets ranges from two to fifteen minutes. If class is not over when she finishes talking and playing, she writes. While writing, she is often verbal and will orally solve problems. For example, one morning she looked up from her writing and said, "Why?" out loud, paused and then said, "How?" paused and said, "Oh!" She then resumed writing.

On these highly verbal days, Anita writes for longer periods of time and is usually more productive than on her quieter days. Once every few weeks she asks Mr. Nelson if she may continue writing and not participate in the next class subject, which is either art or music. Once permission is granted, she hides herself in a corner of the room for fifteen to twenty-five minutes while she writes. She then enthusiastically joins the rest of the class.

The second type of routine following a conference occurs one or twice each week. On these days Anita is contemplative and rather quiet. She often gets a drink, visits the washroom, and then stares out the window or watches as others write or play. One morning, after returning to her desk following a conference about a story she was writing (in which some babies are kidnapped) she laid her head down and very softly sang a lullaby.

According to Mr. Nelson, Anita is a very productive young girl. She does, however, spend less than half her time actually writing after a conference. Most of her time after meeting with the teacher is spent talking, playing, and meeting her physical or psychological needs. The activities seem to provide a release from

the intensity of the conference and give her an opportunity to think, reevaluate, and plan her writing.

Case 4: MANDY

Mandy's activities following conferencing can be described as social, dependent, playful, intense, short-lived and flexible. She likes writing independently but needs to have others nearby to assist with word choice, spelling, and so forth. In this way she depends on others for help and reassurance through the process of writing.

Playfulness is another characteristic of Mandy's post conference activity. She enjoys play with a wide variety of classroom materials as well as with pencil and paper. Coloring is an activity she says she favours above writing but, when given the choice, she usually chooses to write. The exception is when she is illustrating what she has previously written. Mandy's connections between her writing and other activities is evident throughout the school day. For example, while working through her story about a bird's nest, she and her father found,I made the following observations:

- While playing a game in which one child draws a picture and the others guess what it is, she (during each round) called out either bird or nest.
- During art class when toothpicks and softened peas were supplied, she constructed a nest.
- At recess, Mandy, joined by two friends, created a tag game that they called "The Nest and The Birds."
- Following a swimming lesson she remarked to a friend, "Did you see my locker? My clothes made it look like a nest, tee, hee!"
- In music class she was to choose an animal and respond to the music the way she thought the animal would. She chose a bird.
- During book exchange time at the school library Mandy took out three books about birds.

Mandy's writing and thinking about writing is woven through the school day. She clearly connects her writing to all she experiences.

Following conferencing Mandy's activity is intense but does not last long. Her curiosity about so many things makes her

distractable, and she will often involve herself in three to four different activities in a fifteen minute period. Between her drinks, conversations, and play with materials, she writes on and off. While writing, she is intense however, it does not usually last longer than five minutes.

Mandy's flexibility in her post conference activities is evident. She is quick and happy to accommodate others no matter how involved she is in her own activities. Mandy, for example, never writes a word after Mr. Nelson calls her or ends writing period. She also seems to require very little adjustment time between activities.

In summary, Mandy is a content, busy child during writing class. She seems to connect her knowledge and experiences easily to her writing but, enjoys having others near to assist with problems she may encounter. As well, she is usually ready and able to help others when she can.

The Processing/Incubation Time

Allowing time, space, and choice of activities following writing conferences seems to help nuture and maintain the process of childrens' writing. These conditions provide a "shifting time for the sheer play of it" (Calkins, 1980, p. 213). The young writers in this study utilize the time following conferences to incubate their thoughts and ideas about their writing. They make use of any means they have to generate or stimulate thoughts, ideas, and experiences in an effort to grow and learn. Each young writer handles this incubation time differently. However, there are common threads running through all four children's post conference activities. First, this incubation period seems to be releasing and freeing for the writer. Second, physical needs, comfort, and organization of work area are important common components. Finally, a variety of forms of play with objects, words, and/or others is common to all four children's post conference activities.

Children's choice of activities reveals how they seem to utilize the incubation time to release energy and process their thoughts, feelings, and problems related to writing. Warren, with his quiet,high energy and curious nature often chooses to watch others

draw or look at pictures whereas Tony prefers to read, debate, or play at the computer. One morning, immediately after a conference in which Mr. Nelson created a problem for Anita, she walked directly to her desk across from Megan shaking her head sideways and smiling. The following exchange took place between the two girls.

A - Oh boy! (setting her books down and sliding into her desk on her knees)

M - W-h-at happened? (stops her writing to give eye contact)

A - You won't believe it (pause), He, he thinks I should change, change stuff in chapter one or two, to well, make it into one story - that is if I want to publish it all together.

M - He does? (giggles) How'ya gonna do that? (giggles)

A - Who knows (both giggle). Megan goes back to her writing. Anita puts her head on her arm and stares out the window.

Physical needs often become obvious following a conference. The most common are a visit to the washroom or a drink. Warren required these more often than the other young writers but everyone needed them. The comfort of the writer is a very personal matter. It changes daily as conditions such as health, clothing, and climate vary, and each writer has definite personal preferences for writing equipment, furniture, position of body, and so forth. The organization of the writer's work area also differs from one individual to the next. Anita does not like to write when her immediate surroundings are messy or when there is anything on her desk except her writing book. Megan likes her dictionary on her lap. Warren, being more random in nature, prefers other books, writing utensils, and an eraser close by. Finally, Tony likes to have his writing book on a hard surface and his desk, in his words "a little messy so things in there are camouflaged." The physical needs, comfort requirements, and setting organization are as unique as the writer's personality. These organizational, comfort, and physical activities the children in this study engage in are similar to professional writers'. For example, Graves (1983b) writes that he, in the midst of composing, cleans his work area, phones, and eats.

In addition to these activities during the incubation period the children engage in play. They use, in varying degrees objects, words, and other students as part of their play. Objects often played with are dictionaries, computer key boards, puppets, blocks, paints, pencils, and erasers. The play with objects can take one of two forms. Some children audibly reveal a direct connection between their play and their writing. For example, Warren and Anita sometimes play with paints, puppets, or blocks and have the same characters, settings, or plot involved in their play as in their writing. The other form of play is characterized as simple object manipulation while the writers thoughts are elsewhere. For example, Mandy often plays with her eraser (turning it over in her hand and flipping it through her fingers) while she stares out the window. One morning as she did this I interrupted her and asked if she wouldn't mind telling me what she was thinking. She responded with, "Oh, I'm just thinking 'bout the birds in this (she points to her story) and stuff."

The young writers' play activity with words is obvious, as writing is the activity of playing with words, thoughts, and images.

Beyond the play with words, paper, and pencil, the young writers also play games such as word bingo and scrabble. Words are often played with orally as stories are shared between classmates or as Mr. Nelson reads.

Play with others is highly interactive during this incubation period. The sharing of experiences, topics, and books, or negotiations are the most common social exchanges. This social aspect of writing can be noisy however, the benefits to the children's writing, and language development seem to far outweigh the temporarily higher level of work noise.

Summary

Each aspect of the incubation period following conferencing seems to provide young writers with the opportunity to become involved in activities that are needed during this phase of their writing. The incubation period provides a writer with time to work through thoughts mentally and orally as well as an opportunity to recover from the intense interaction of the conference. Mr. Nelson's

classroom provides young writers with the time, space, and equipment to experiment, explore, and express themselves as individuals.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter I summarize the conclusions of this study by connecting the findings described in each chapter. Next, I present the implications of the study to teaching and further research. Finally, I close with a short personal statement.

Conclusions

This study provides descriptive insight into the nature of conference interaction and post conference activities. Case study profiles, perceptions, and activities are revealed through description. The nature of conference interaction is organized and analyzed utilizing the concept of triangulation (Guba, 1981, Denzin, 1978). Interviews, informal conversations, childrens' writing samples, a teacher journal, and conference audio tapes intertwine to support and extend findings. My fieldnotes, observations, and journal, integrated in one notebook, also supplement other findings.

The nature of conference interaction is described as a "secondary world" which teacher and child enter together. Because he can never anticipate children's writings, ideas or comments, the teacher has a dilemma as to what to say and do in a conference to aid and encourage each child. Mr. Nelson's view is that no advice or preplanned words are personal enough to meet the needs of each young writer. He believes the teacher and child learn from each other continually.

Mr. Nelson describes his overall conferencing role as that of a cheerleader. Within this role he creates and solves problems, monitors, and listens, responds, teaches, models, and learns. It is through each of these roles that he tries to meet each child's particular needs. His ability to meet children's needs through these roles depends greatly on his knowledge of the child (such as learning style, personality, areas of expertise, and so forth) and his ability to perceive the need(s) of the writer. Mr. Nelson believes it also helps to be a writer himself as he can empathize from experience. Each conference blends together many of these roles with Mr. Nelson's understanding of children in general, the particular child he is conferencing, and his own writing experience.

The child and Mr. Nelson each bring different purposes, motives, and feelings. The result is conferences that are spontaneous, unique learning experiences that are usually very tiring for both the teacher and the student.

The four young writers in this study seemed to enjoy conferencing. The one-on-one experience was positive. Each child had different preferences concerning how many conferences they felt they needed, who needed to initiate the meeting, and how much input they wanted from Mr. Nelson. Mr. Nelson and the children spoke of having to listen carefully to each other during the conference in order to learn preferences and expectations. Conferencing, for all involved, appeared to be a satisfying, rewarding, draining experience.

The intense "Secondary World" (Benton and Fox, 1985) inside the conference demands release time for the young writer. Rarely do children write immediately after conferencing. They each have their own means of incubating and processing their thoughts and problems. By allowing an incubation or shifting time after conferencing, children are able to choose activities and converse.

The activities children chose to involve themselves in after conferencing seem to reveal the adjustments necessary in order to reenter the "Primary World" (Benton and Fox, 1985) or environment outside of the conference. These social and private activities following conferencing ranged from visits to the washroom or drinking fountain to play with puppets and blocks.

Implications for Teachers

> It wasn't until I began examining the writing of children such as Jane however, that I started to understand what it was I had actually learned and the importance of that learning for helping others become writers (Newman, 1983, p. 870).

I feel strongly, as do Kantor, Kirby and Goetz (1981) and Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984), that research needs to be applicable for classroom teachers and administrators. Throughout this study I have attempted to clearly and concisely describe my experience. However, in doing so I have also created expectations about the future.

The findings of this study provide several implications for conducting conferences and stimulating the post conference activities of young writers.

It is important that teachers understand that they, along with the young children they conference, both enter conferences with their own motives needs and purposes. In order for the conference to be an effective pedagogical tool and a learning experience for the child, the teacher must be sensitive to the childs words, body language, and emotions. Then, s/he can carefully integrate his/her motives, purposes with the child's.

"Children in our literacy culture have the potential to guide their own growth" (Juliebo, 1985, p.300). This ability to "guide their own growth" can be easily crushed with words or actions during a conference if the teacher does not take into account the fragility of writers. Children need an "internal time" after the conference in order to digest their thoughts and ideas. Young writers also need time and space to move, permission to talk, and materials to play with in order to give meaning to their writing (Graves, 1983).

Some of the worst mistakes in teaching writing are made during interaction with the writer. Positive conferencing recognizes children's need to discuss their work in a truly helpful, caring exchange. Young writers are very vulnerable when writing - a task many adults shy away from. Young writers need to be shown respect and tenderness through supportive conferencing. If given, this support can be instrumental in helping children develop a love for writing and an ability to meaningfully and clearly express themselves.

Directions for Further Research

There has been very little research of any kind into writing conferences. Therefore, the possibilities for further research are almost endless. This descriptive study, along with other studies related to writing conferences with young children, needs to be repeated with, and without, variations in design.

The design and findings of this study raise numerous possibilities for further inquiry. The following are eight potential

directions for studies that delve into conferencing and the happenings that follow.

1. This study took place in a grade one classroom. A replication of this descriptive study would increase understanding about conferencing and provide data for comparisons.

2. The findings of this study suggest that children need time to move about the classroom after conferencing. They need to talk, to play, and think through their writing. The findings of this study were limited to one teacher and four children over a six week time period. A longitudinal study could be undertaken to describe children's writing conferences and the post conference happenings over time.

3. The methodology utilized in this study did not include video taping. A study using the added dimension of video could add to the quality of a similar descriptive study. Similarly, the data collected was limited to the students' and teacher's perspective. Studies that would include the

parents' perspective could be undertaken to supplement the data.

4. In the classroom of the present study, the teacher taught different forms of writing throughout the year. The findings of this study provide little information about how this influenced conferencing or children's writing. A study which investigates how a specific genre focus by the teacher influences conferencing could provide valuable information.

5. The number of participants of this study greatly limits its generalizability. A study with a larger number of participants sample could be done to see if the same patterns emerge. Another possibility is to use more than one teacher.

6. The findings of this study revealed that the nature of a child's conference varies each time. Studies could be done that would look at conferencing over a longer period of time. The relationships between teacher's and students'

perceptions of conferencing in relation to the stage of a piece of writing.

7. Play with classroom materials emerged in this study as an important facilitating factor in incubating thoughts about writing. A study concerned with the relationship between play and the progress and productivity of children's writing may provide insight into how children work through thoughts about writing and how teachers can utilize play more effectively in writing class.

8. All of the children involved in this study enjoyed conferencing and said it helped them. This study did not examine the impact of conferencing on student writing. A study designed with this goal may provide information about how conferences promote growth in writing.

Concluding Personal Statement

Although I know infinitely more about myself than I do about the other, there is a crucial

> respect in which the knowledge I have of the other transcends myself knowledge (Shutz, 1970, p. 32).

My fieldwork and the writing experiences of this thesis have deepened my belief that "the essential human act at the heart of writing is the act of giving." (Elbow, 1981, p. 21) As the children in this study gave gifts of themselves, I found myself giving as I wrote about my experience with them. The struggle of thinking, writing, editing, and rewriting has enriched my life in numerous ways. For in my reaching to understand others, I have come to more fully understand myself.

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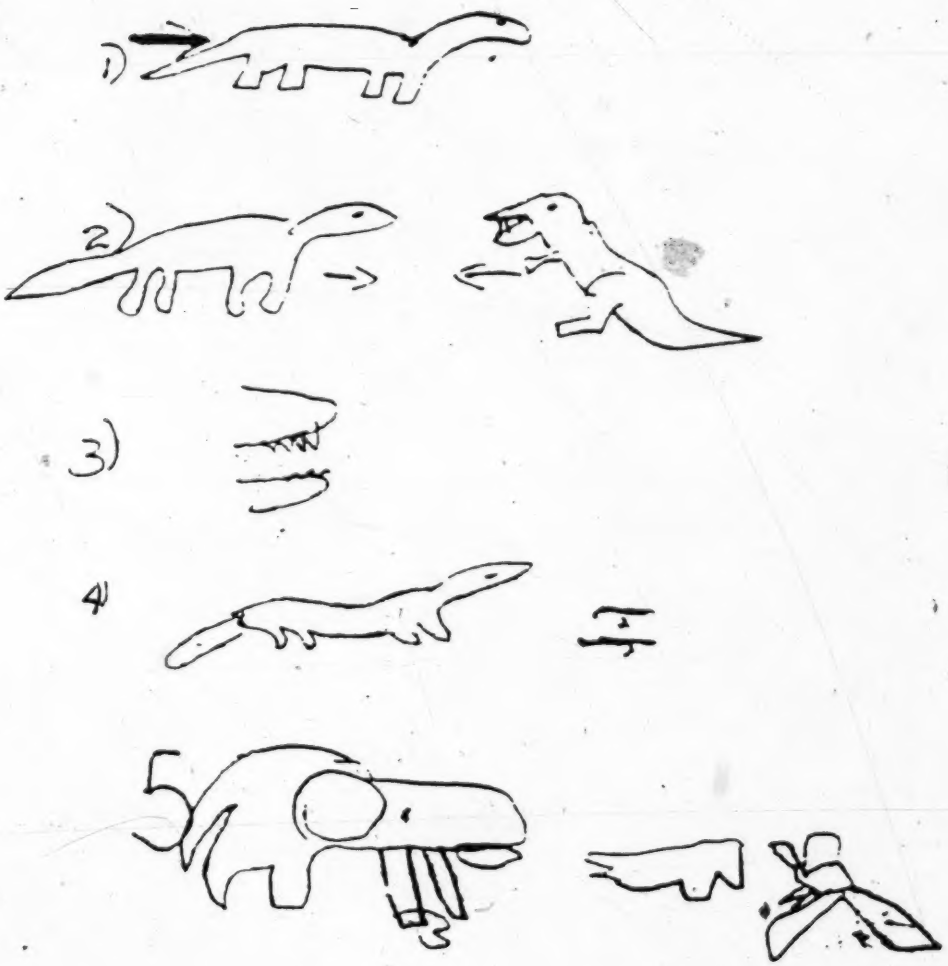
APPENDIX A

Mr. Nelson's Cartoon For Warren



APPENDIX B1

Children's Writing Samples

TONY

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Sivilisation

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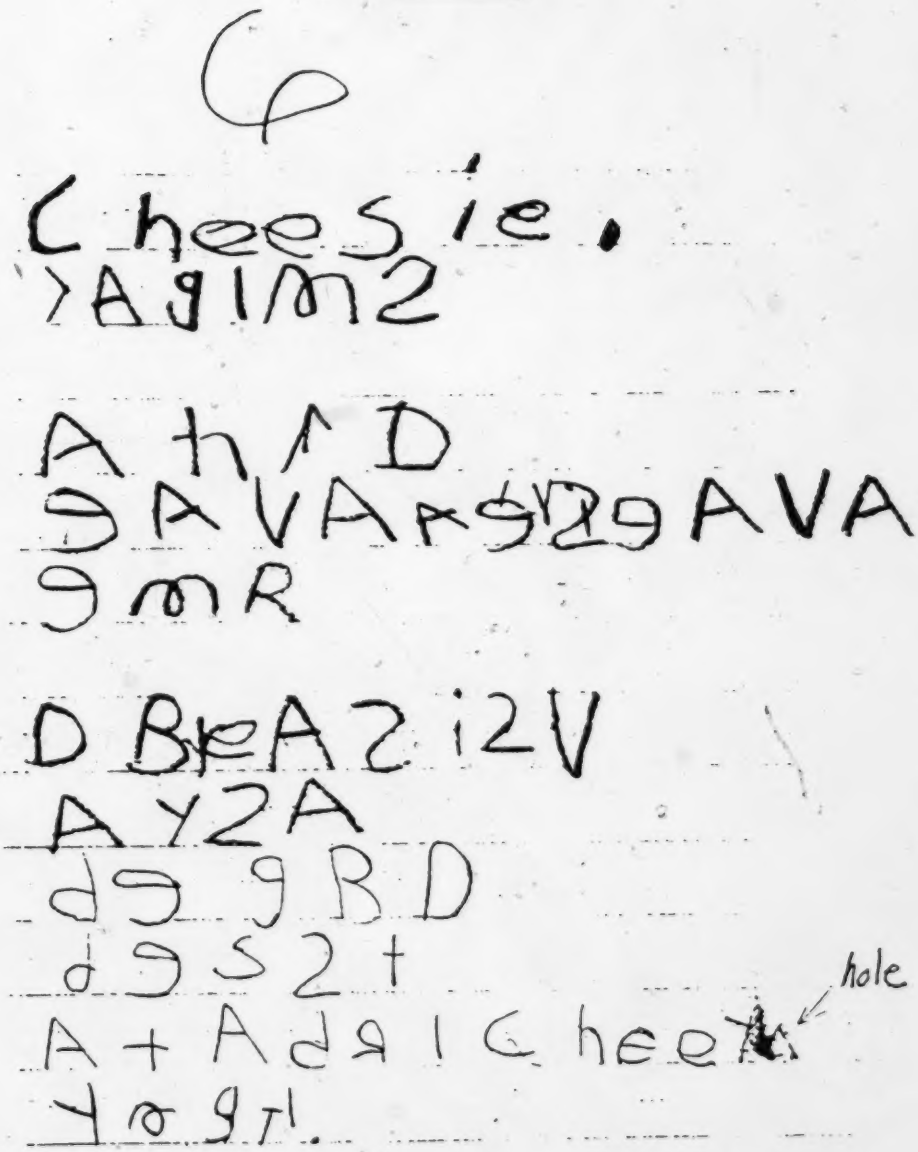
to the North-
west. And when
it vas in europe

APPENDIX B2

Children's Writing Samples

WARREN



APPENDIX B3

Children's Writing Samples

ANITA

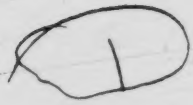
Chapter 2

The kids were har
e s
The next day
all our friends
came and taled
told
us good news
the good news
was about a
Stranger who
stranger
kidinuy our

APPENDIX B4

Children's Writing Samples

MANDY



War a nest
Dad war boi me
Dad sab we
hf to kep hrt sat
brt nest saf

APPENDIX C

Happenings Following Conferences

Date	Summary of Activities
13th	-went back to his desk, put his book on the desk over his pencil. Walked over to the computer and ran his fingers over the keyboard. Then put his book in desk with the pencil. He pushed his chair in and stood tapping his fingers on his desk as if typing. Class was dismissed.
20th	-went off with another boy not involved in the conference behind the teachers desk on the floor. They talked about working together on chapter 2 after telling him that "everyone likes chapter 1 and Mr. Nelson is going to retype it." They talked for 15-20 minutes until class was over.
3rd	-went to Warren and tapped his arm. He asked Warren to "come help me at the computer." Warrren said, "Okay." They sat at the computer giggling and talking about his story.

Warren: Okay, Tony, let's go. Let's work out how much I can type.

Tony: Well, only a little, but it's important you help me (began to type).

Warren: That isn't very much of a story. It must be a report.

After trying for five minutes Tony went to his desk and wrote with his head down.

4th -class was over. He said, "yeah!" He dropped his book in his desk, ran outside and played shinny.

5th -hid his books under the drawer of his desk. In one minute, as Mr. Nelson had said, he called time to clean up. He caught Mr. Nelson's eye, winked and quickly put his things away. Mr. Nelson said, "Tony, I asked you to work in your writer's workshop.

<u>You</u> . . ." ("you" is drawn out.) Tony laughed and ran out for recess.

APPENDIX C2

Happenings Following Conferencing

WARREN

Date	Summary of Activities
18th	-skipped and hopped to desk, sat and nibbled lead of pencil. Then, wrote one-half a page non-stop except to read over twice what he already had. -At his desk, Warren pointed to the scripted letter for "A" and tried to use the same letters etc. while copying for a good final copy. He frowned and wrinkled his forehead a lot. His head rested on his left arm as he wrote.
19th	-Warren walked slowly back to his desk and joined in the conversation there about recess games. He kept tapping his pencil through the discussion. After about six minutes, he shut his book and pulled out one book he'd already published and with his pencil, traced letters and continued to chat about recess games.
20th	-he jumped out of the conference seat and ran to his desk. He played with his eraser and pencil. Then, he flipped

through his book reading what he'd already written on other days. He put his head down on his left arm and began to write. He mumbled while he did this, looked at neighbor's book, then head back down, wriggled in his desk, took out a library book (Prehistoric Man), and looked at the pictures. Then he pushed the book on to the floor (large bang). Serious face, head went back down, and with the pencil began writing again.

21st -he walked to desk and drilled a hole into his book with his pencil for 5 minutes. Then class was over. He shut his book and slid down the hall for recess (like skating).

26th -he colored dinosaur tails (30 seconds), opened desk and put on another shirt, took glasses off, rubbed nose, put them on again, chewed pencil, wrinkled forehead, opened his desk, and took out his dictionary. He opened up to "A", pressed cover back, looked at the words, then looked up and around. He flipped to "D", looked back at pictures the teacher had drawn during the conference. Began to add to the teacher's pictures; then put #5 beside his picture (teacher had drawn). He made growling, slurping noises; copied dinosaur from the dictionary and said,

"Brontosaurus" while he wrote it.

He played wmth a pencil in his mouth and watched the girl across from him write.

Said "Dinosaur"; hummed while he went over the pictures about one cm. above them in the air. Stood up, hands in pockets, and went to the bathroom.

4th -he went back with another boy and worked at the illustrations of his book laying on the rug.

5th -he said, "Wow!" on his way walking back to his desk.

-put everything on his desk and went and got a drink at the classroom fountain. His drink took 3 minutes. Then, he played with the water, pushing it through his fingers.

-at the fountain talked with friends about the paintings on the wall. Told the painter his picture was "good".

-slid around the room (like a speed skater) taking a long route to his desk.

-went to the rug, picked up some laminating film and played with it (pulling it in between his fingers and over his lips), dropped the film.

-standing, he began to look in his desk for his pencil, hopped over to the pencil box (like a rabbit), took a pencil.

-slid (skate like) back to his desk; sat down and began to work with his head down on his arm, copying Mr. Nelson's printing; stopped and frowned.

-called Sam over and asked him to do the table of contents for him. Sam said, "Sure!" and traced Mr. Nelson's printing.

APPENDIX C3

Happenings Following Conferencing

ANITA

Date	Summary of Activities
20th	-walked away shaking head left and right; put writing in desk and went and got a drink. Then, went out for recess without speaking to anyone.
25th	-walked to desk, wrote while talking and verbalizing what she was writing for eight minutes. Then stared out the window (3 minutes). Began writing again (wrote 5 words); looked up said, "Why?" out loud (pause), "How?" then,"Oh!" Continued writing. -After writing time was over, she went and asked if she could "continue writing and not do art." The teacher said, "Yes". She took her book to a corner of the rug behind a divider and wrote for 15 minutes while the others did art.
2nd	-She walked to her desk, set her book and pencil down,

and chatted to Mandy across from her. She talked about her stories

Anita: I don't know.

Mandy: What?

Anita: If I have one or two stories.

Mandy: Count'm. One, two."

Anita: No! It's tougher Mandy!

Mandy: Oh boy!

(They both laughed)

-She wrote four words (in their bed alone)(stopped).

-Chewed on pencil, stared (40 seconds), then wrote a little more. She stopped , talked to herself about what will happen next in her story. She flipped through her book. She played X's and O's with her neighbor to the side and they chatted about the pin on her sweater.

-She looked at me and said, "No one knows what this says ...I need a scribble."

-She said, "I'm goanna try to fix this together." Her neighbor ignored her and asked her to spell a word.

-"Now I'm ready to go be by myself, but first I clean it up."

Mandy (silently) followed her. They got chairs to sit on and to put their feet up on. They giggled about

chairs, bending down to write, and discussed a television program called Pee Wee.

-She sang a lullaby "Baby, baby . . ." Class was over.

3rd -Played with dinosaur puppets and had one named "Stranger" (like a character in her story).

5th -the period ended just as she finished her brief conference. She skipped to her desk, put her book away, and watched Mr. Nelson as he kept smiling as she did. She skipped all recess.

APPENDIX C4

Happenings Following Conferencing

MANDY

Date	Summary of Activities
13th	-stared for approximately 30 seconds looking at the ceiling. (Never spoke for over 15 minutes). -began to use her dictionary (letter R); pointed to rabbit. -wrote, erased, played with eraser, wrote, checked walls for spelling of words, wrote, looked up and around, erased, and wrote repeatedly.
18th	-called Kirsten to move her chair near to hers. Then Kisten suggested they lay under an easel. Mandy agreed. After stamping the date stamp on a fresh page, they wrote - (each in their own book). Mandy and Kirsten in the Nest. They talked about the nest at Mandy's house for ten minutes. Class was over following this conference. She put her books away and walked out of class holding hands with a friend and talking about baby birds. At

recess, they pretended they were birds and could fly.

19th -Mandy took out her crayons and just touched them; then began to recopy her letter.

25th -wrote, and erased repeatedly, often referring to environmental print. After two minutes she began to wiggle back and forth, stood up, picked up her chair, and moved over beside Kirsten's. They chatted about their writing for the rest of the class period (10 minutes). "My story's about a nest--a real nest!" "We need to be together. We seem to be doing the same story." Mandy wrote, "the baby bird was blue."

3rd -With dinosaur puppets she made up a story and had them live in a nest for a home. Then, she chose a book about birds and ducks.

4th -After the first conference, she went back to her desk, cleared it off, and printed, copying from Mr. Nelson's writing. She sharpened her pencil two times. She came and stood by Mr. Nelson. He made time for her. She had put too much on one page. She went back to her desk and stood leaning over as she wrote.

-She went back to illustrate her title page. She never

lifted her head from the task for six minutes.

-She asked a neighbor to read it; then sharpened her pencil; wiggled in her desk and asked the same neighbor to work with her laying on the rug. They laid and chatted for ten minutes. "Look at this part," she said as she stood by the teacher wiggling, while leaning against the table. Mr. Nelson said, "just a moment." She replied, "I need to go to the washroom." She went with Mr. Nelson to laminate. She never did go to the bathroom.

5th -Mandy ran to her desk and copied the name of her story and her name. Intense and undistracted she ran back to the teacher for a conference but Mr. Nelson said the period was over so she said, "Oh"; ran and put book her book away and lined up.